

The medbay was a stark contrast to the chaos outside. The walls were a pristine white, illuminated by the soft glow of overhead lights. The air was filled with the faint hum of medical equipment, a constant reminder of the advanced technology at our disposal. Rows of beds lined the room, each equipped with monitors displaying vital signs in a rhythmic dance of numbers and graphs.



The scent of antiseptic hung in the air, mingling with the faint aroma of fresh linens. Nurses moved with practiced efficiency; their footsteps barely audible on the polished floor. The atmosphere was one of calm and order, a sanctuary amidst the turmoil.

In the center of the room, a large window offered a view of the city skyline, the buildings standing tall and resolute against the horizon. It was a reminder of what we were fighting for, the lives and futures that depended on our success.

Ahnaf lay unconscious on a medbay bed, his usually rapid healing factor failing to mend the deep wounds inflicted by Khan. The sterile white walls and the hum of medical equipment did little to ease my anxiety.

"Why isn't he healing?" I muttered to myself, my eyes darting between the monitors displaying Ahnaf's vitals. The numbers were stable, but the wounds remained stubbornly open. My thoughts were a whirlwind of concern, not just for Ahnaf, but for Captain Davis, Captain James, Dr. Patel, and Miss Tiffany, who were still at the Canyon Airfield, facing the aftermath of Khan's brutal attack.



Just as I was about to lose myself in a spiral of worry, the door to the medbay slid open. Director Leonis, his face etched with grim determination, stepped inside.

"Eric," Leonis began, his voice steady but laced with urgency. "Khan left the airfield shortly after you took Ahnaf away. Our scouts report

that he's not heading towards the city. It seems like he got what he wanted, for now."

I felt a mix of relief and confusion. "What do you mean? What did he want?"

Leonis shook his head. "We're not sure yet. But we need to stay vigilant. This isn't over."

I glanced back at Ahnaf, my friend's face pale and still. "I can't leave him like this. What if he doesn't heal?"

Leonis placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "We'll do everything we can to help him. But right now, we need you to calm down and clean yourself up okay. We will handle Ahnaf here."

I took a deep breath, steeling myself for the battle ahead. "Alright. Let's do this."

As we left the medbay, I couldn't shake the feeling of dread that clung to me. The city was in danger, and our team was scattered and wounded. But I knew we had to fight, no matter the odds.

Walking through the dimly lit corridors, my mind was a storm of thoughts and emotions. The Step UP drug had given me incredible speed, but what good was it if all I could do was run? I had trained tirelessly under Captain Davis, Lt. Cheng, and Dr. Patel, pushing my limits every day. Yet, when it came down to it, I couldn't protect my friends. I couldn't stop Khan.



I remembered the look in Ahnaf's eyes as he charged at Khan, fueled by the memory of his father's sacrifice. His determination, his bravery—it was something I admired, something I wished I had. But all I could do was run, grabbing Ahnaf and sprinting towards The Facility, leaving the others to fend for themselves.

"Eric, focus," I whispered to myself, trying to shake off the self-doubt. "You can't afford to lose it now."

But the thoughts kept creeping in. What if I wasn't strong enough? What if I failed again? The weight of responsibility felt like a crushing burden on my shoulders. I had to be faster, stronger, better. But no matter how hard I tried, it never seemed to be enough.

As we reached the command center, Leonis turned to me. "Eric, we need to come up with a plan. Khan may have left for now, but he'll be back. And we need to be ready."

I nodded, trying to push aside the doubts and focus on the task at hand. "What's our next move?"

Leonis began outlining the strategy, but my mind kept drifting back to Ahnaf, lying in the medbay, and the others still at the airfield. I had to find a way to make things right.

I took a deep breath and dialed Kelly's number, my hands trembling. I knew I wasn't supposed to call her, but I couldn't help it. I needed to talk to her.

"Hello?" Kelly's voice came through, sounding cheerful and unaware of the storm that was about to hit.

"Kelly, it's Eric," I said, my voice cracking. "I... I need to tell you something about Ahnaf."

There was a pause on the other end. "Eric, what's wrong? Is Ahnaf okay?"

Tears welled up in my eyes as I struggled to find the words. "He's... he's hurt, Kelly. Really bad. We're at the Nexus Facility, and his healing factor isn't working. I don't know what to do."

"Oh my God," Kelly's voice was filled with panic. "I need to see him! I need to be there Eric please.... please tell me where you guys are at!"

"I know, but I'm not supposed to tell you this," I said, wiping away the tears. "But I can't keep it from you. You deserve to know. We're at the Nexus Facility, about a couple of miles away from Leeds....."

I didn't want to but I gave her the location anyways.

"Eric, I'm coming right now," she insisted. "I don't care about the rules. Ahnaf needs me, and so do you."

"Please be careful," I whispered, my heart aching. "I can't lose you too."

"I'll be there as soon as I can," Kelly said, her voice determined.  
"take care Eric."

As I hung up the phone, a sense of relief washed over me. I knew I had broken the rules, but I couldn't bear to keep Kelly in the dark. She was my best friend, and Ahnaf's girlfriend. She had a right to know, and I needed her support more than ever.

I stood by Ahnaf's bed, my heart heavy with worry. His usually rapid healing factor was failing to mend the deep wounds inflicted by Khan. The monitors beeped steadily, but the sight of his unmoving form was almost too much to bear.

Suddenly, the doors to the medbay burst open. I turned to see Kelly and Ahnaf's mother, Ruvana, rushing in. Their faces were etched with fear and desperation.



"Ahnaf!" Kelly screamed, her voice breaking as she ran to his side. She grabbed his hand, tears streaming down her face. "Oh my God, Ahnaf, please wake up!"

Ruvana followed closely behind, her eyes wide with panic. "My son what happened to my son?" she cried, looking at me for answers.

I swallowed hard, trying to keep my own emotions in check. "Khan... he hurt Ahnaf badly. His healing factor isn't working, and we don't know why."

Kelly's sobs filled the room as she clung to Ahnaf's hand. "You have to wake up, Ahnaf. You can't leave us. We need you."



Ruvana placed a trembling hand on Ahnaf's forehead, her eyes filled with tears. "My brave boy," she whispered. "You have to fight. You have to come back to us."

I felt a lump in my throat as I watched them. The weight of my own guilt pressed down on me. I had brought Ahnaf here, but I couldn't save him. All the training, all the enhancements from the Step UP drug, and all I could do was run.

"Eric," Kelly's voice broke through my thoughts. "What are we going to do? How can we help him?"

I shook my head, feeling helpless. "I don't know, Kelly. We're doing everything we can, but it's like his body isn't responding."

Ruvana looked at me, her eyes pleading. "There must be something. Anything. Please, Eric."

I took a deep breath, trying to steady myself. "We'll keep trying. The doctors are working on it. We won't give up on him."

Doctors and security personnel rushed in, their faces set with determination. They gently but firmly took hold of Ruvana and Kelly, guiding them towards the exit.

"No! Let me go!" Kelly screamed, her voice filled with desperation. "I need to stay with him!"

Ruvana struggled against the security guards, her eyes blazing with anger. "You can't do this! He's my son!"

"Please, ma'am, we need to ensure the safety of everyone here," one of the doctors said, trying to remain calm.

As they were escorted out, Director Leonis appeared in the hallway, his expression serious but composed. He approached Ruvana and Kelly, his presence commanding attention.



"Director Leonis," Ruvana spat, her voice trembling with fury. "You said you would protect Ahnaf. Look at him! How can you let this happen?"

Leonis raised his hands in a calming gesture. "Mrs. Ruvana, I understand your anger and fear. We're doing everything we can to help Ahnaf. Please, trust us."

"Trust you?" Ruvana's voice broke, tears streaming down her face. "I trusted you, and now my son is lying there, fighting for his life. I can't just stand by and do nothing."

Leonis took a deep breath, his eyes filled with empathy. "I know you're scared. But moving Ahnaf right now could be dangerous. Our team here is highly skilled, and we're doing everything possible to stabilize him."

Ruvana shook her head, her voice firm. "No. I don't trust you anymore. I'm taking Ahnaf to the Central Hospital, where I know he'll get the best care."

Leonis stepped closer, his tone gentle but resolute. "Mrs. Ruvana, please reconsider. Moving him could worsen his condition. We have the resources and expertise to help him here much more than any hospital in UK."

But Ruvana was unwavering. "I've made up my mind. I won't let my son stay here another minute whether you have the best facilities or not. I am done with your lies."

Kelly looked at Leonis, her eyes pleading. "Please, Director, let us take him. We can't bear to lose him."



Leonis sighed, realizing the depth of their determination. "Alright. We'll prepare for the transfer. But please understand, this is a risk."

Ruvana nodded, her resolve unshaken. "Thank you. We'll take that risk."





As the preparations for Ahnaf's transfer began, I stood there, feeling a mix of relief and fear. The struggle to save Ahnaf was far from over, and the road ahead was uncertain. But one thing was clear: we would fight for him, no matter the cost.

As they took Ahnaf away for the hospital, I stood near a wall with Director Leonis. The tension in the air was palpable, and we were both lost in our own thoughts. The weight of the situation pressed down on us, making it hard to breathe.

"Why did you allow them to take Ahnaf?" I finally asked, breaking the silence. "You were so stubborn about keeping him here, and we have the best facilities to help him."

Leonis sighed, his shoulders slumping. "Eric, we don't know what's going to happen to Ahnaf. His wounds are severe enough to kill any man in seconds, but he survives. Maybe the love and care of his family is what he needs right now. And if... if he doesn't make it, at least he'll be with the people he loves."

I felt a lump in my throat as I processed his words. "You think he might not make it?"

Leonis looked at me, his eyes filled with a sadness I hadn't seen before. "I don't know, Eric. But I do know that sometimes, being with loved ones can make all the difference. You should go too. Be with him."

I nodded, feeling a mix of fear and determination. "You're right. I need to be there for him."

Leonis stops, "Oh yes before that, come to my office."

We stepped into the dimly lit room. Leonis was sitting behind his desk, his expression serious. "Eric, we need to talk about what happened earlier when u arrived," he said, gesturing for me to sit.

I took a seat, feeling a knot of anxiety tighten in my stomach. "You mean the time travel thing?"



He nodded. "Yes. What you did defies everything we know about physics. No object with mass is supposed to be able to travel faster than the speed of light. Yet, you managed to not only achieve that speed but also travel back in time by a minute."

I swallowed hard, trying to make sense of it myself. "I don't know how it happened, Leonis. I just... I needed to save Ahnaf. I pushed myself harder than ever before, and suddenly, I was there, a minute before."

Leonis leaned back in his chair, his eyes thoughtful. "There are theories, of course. Some scientists speculate about the existence of tachyons, hypothetical particles that travel faster than light. But those are just theories, and they don't account for the fact that you, a human with mass, managed to achieve this."

I nodded, feeling a mix of awe and confusion. "So, what does this mean?"

Leonis leaned forward, pulling out a diagram from his desk drawer. He spread it out on the table, and I could see it was a detailed map of the area, marked with several points.



"Eric, take a look at this," he said, pointing to the diagram. "This is what we've been able to piece together from the surveillance footage and sensor data."

Leonis pointed to the first mark on the diagram. "Point A is where you began running, right here on the battlefield."

I nodded, following his finger as he traced a line to the next mark. "Point B is where you were last observed running at your maximum speed. This is where things get intriguing."

Leonis's finger moved to the final mark. "Point D is where you arrived at the facility, carrying Ahnaf. However, the entire segment from Point C to D is missing. There's no data, no visual record, nothing. It's as if you vanished and reappeared."



I stared at the diagram, trying to comprehend it. "So, what happened to Point C?"

Leonis sighed, his expression thoughtful. "That's the mystery. It's as if you entered a different dimension or a time warp. The sensors couldn't track you, and the cameras didn't capture anything. It's like you skipped that part of the journey entirely."

A chill ran down my spine. "So, you're saying I... what, teleported?"

He shook his head. "Not exactly. It's more like you bent the fabric of space-time. You moved so fast that you bypassed the normal constraints of our reality. It's unprecedented and seemingly impossible."

"I am... really confused," I admitted.

Leonis leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed on the diagram. "Eric, the best theory we have right now is that Point C represents a different dimension. A place where our laws of physics don't apply."

I stared at him, trying to grasp the enormity of what he was saying. "A different dimension?"

He nodded. "Yes. When you reached Point B, you must have tapped into the powers of this other dimension. It's as if you entered a realm where time and space operate differently, allowing you to travel back in time and reappear at Point D."

A shiver ran down my spine. "So, I didn't just run faster. I crossed into another dimension?"

"Exactly," Leonis said, his voice filled with a mix of awe and concern. "This other dimension could be a place where the constraints of our reality don't exist. By accessing it, you were able to bypass the normal flow of time and space. However, I don't think you can access that power at will. I believe something else entirely enabled you to do so."

"Look I know you want me to try it again and all but I a-"

Leonis placed a hand on my shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "Go. We'll handle things here. Your family and Ahnaf needs you."

"Thank you.... For everything Leonis." I replied.

As I turned to leave, tired and confused. I glanced back at Leonis. He stood there, looking defeated and broken. The weight of our situation was clearly taking its toll on him. He had always been our rock, our leader, but now he seemed powerless to stop Khan.

Leonis watched me walk away, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. He had always prided himself on being able to make the tough decisions, to lead with strength and conviction. But now, as he stood in the empty hallway, he felt a crushing sense of helplessness.

He replayed the events of the past few days in his mind, the relentless attacks, the desperate battles, and the mounting casualties. He had seen his team pushed to their limits, and despite their best efforts, they were barely holding on. The image of Ahnaf, lying pale and still in the medbay, haunted him.

"How did it come to this?" he whispered to himself, his voice barely audible. "We were supposed to be prepared. We were supposed to at least find a weakness or put a dent in him."

Leonis had always believed in the power of preparation and strategy. He had spent countless hours planning, training, and equipping his team to face any threat. But Khan was unlike any adversary they had ever encountered. His strength, his ruthlessness, it was as if he was unstoppable.

The thought of losing Ahnaf, one of their strongest and most determined fighters, was almost too much to bear. Leonis had seen the bond between Ahnaf and his family, the love and support that had always driven him. Maybe, just maybe, being with them would give Ahnaf the strength to pull through.

But the doubt lingered. What if it wasn't enough? What if they lost him? The thought gnawed at Leonis, a constant reminder of his own limitations.

He took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. "I have to stay strong," he told himself. "For the team, for the city. .... For the fate of the world. We can't give up."

But as he walked back to his office, the weight of his responsibilities pressed down on him. He felt the cracks in his resolve, the fear that he was losing control. He had always been the one to inspire confidence, to lead with unwavering determination. But now, he felt like he was standing on the edge of a precipice, staring into the abyss.

As he entered his office, he closed the door behind him and leaned against it, his eyes closing for a moment. The room was filled with maps, reports, and plans, a testament to his relentless efforts to protect the city. But in that moment, it all felt like a fragile façade.

Leonis sank into his chair, his head in his hands. "What if we can't stop him?" he thought, the fear gnawing at his insides. "What if all our efforts are in vain?"

But even in the depths of his despair, a flicker of hope remained. He thought of Eric, of Ahnaf, of the team that had become like family to him. They had faced impossible odds before, and they had always found a way to prevail.

"There must be a way," he whispered to himself. "Hmmmm..... Why didn't I think of this before. It is about time we visit that place.... I'll have to assemble a team.. The best of the best.."

With a renewed sense of determination, Leonis straightened up and began to review the latest reports. The battle was far from over, and he knew that every decision he made could mean the difference between victory and defeat.

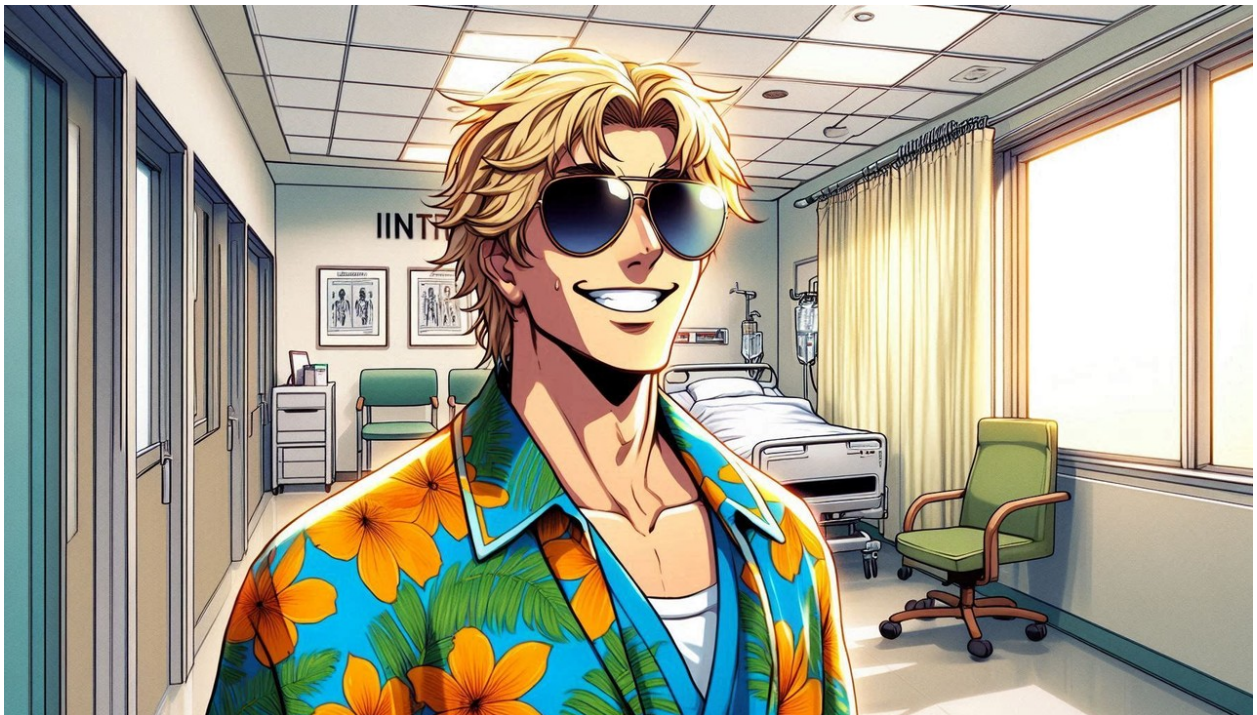


The Central Hospital of Leeds was a sprawling complex, a beacon of hope and healing in the heart of the city. The building's modern architecture, with its sleek glass façade and meticulously landscaped gardens, exuded an air of calm and efficiency. Inside, the corridors were bustling with activity, doctors and nurses moving with purpose, their footsteps echoing off the polished floors.



I sat in the Ahnaf's inpatient room, the steady beeping of the monitors inside a constant reminder of his fragile state. Ms. Ruvana sat beside me, her eyes red from a week of worry and sleepless nights. We had settled into a routine of silent support, each lost in our own thoughts.

Suddenly, the double doors at the end of the corridor swung open with a dramatic flourish. James sauntered in, his usual comedic swagger on full display. He was wearing a ridiculous pair of oversized sunglasses and a bright Hawaiian shirt that clashed horribly with the hospital's sterile environment.



"Well, well, well, look who we have here!" James announced, his voice echoing down the hallway. "The dynamic duo, holding down the fort. How's our boy doing?"

Ms. Ruvana and I exchanged amused glances. James always had a way of lightening the mood, even in the most dire of circumstances.

"Still in a coma," I replied, trying to suppress a smile. "But he's stable."

James nodded, then turned his attention to Ms. Ruvana. "And who is this lovely lady? Ahnaf's mother, I presume? You must be the source of his good looks."

Ms. Ruvana chuckled, a small smile breaking through her worry. "Yes, I'm Ruvana. And you must be James, the one with the... unique sense of style."

James grinned, taking a seat beside her. "Guilty as charged. But I must say, Mrs. Ruvana, you look far too young to be Ahnaf's mother. Are you sure you're not his sister?"

Ms. Ruvana laughed, shaking her head. "Flattery will get you nowhere, young man. But thank you."

I couldn't resist joining in. "Careful, James. If Tiffany hears about this, you might be in trouble."

James's eyes widened in mock horror. "Oh no, not Tiffany! She'll have my head! Please, Eric, have mercy."

I leaned back, enjoying the moment. "Well, I suppose I could keep quiet... for a price."

James groaned, throwing his hands up in defeat. "Alright, alright. What do you want? My secret stash of chocolate? My prized comic book collection?"

Ms. Ruvana shook her head, clearly amused by our antics. "You two are quite the pair. It's good to see some laughter around here."

James winked at her. "Anything to lighten the mood, Mrs. Ruvana. We're all in this together."

As we continued to banter, the tension that had been hanging over us for the past week seemed to lift, if only for a moment. Ahnaf might still be in a coma, but we were determined to keep our spirits up and support each other through this difficult time.

The door creaked open once more, and this time, Ramsey stepped into the room. His presence was commanding, his eyes scanning the room with a mixture of concern and determination. Captain James remained standing, his posture rigid and alert. Ruvana and I sat nearby, our eyes shifting between the new arrival and Ahnaf, who lay unconscious on the bed.



Ramsey's gaze softened as it landed on Ahnaf, but the moment was fleeting. His eyes then met those of Ahnaf's mother, and the air grew thick with unspoken tension. She stood by her son's side, her expression a blend of worry and defiance.

"How is he?" Ramsey asked, his voice low but steady.

Ahnaf's mother straightened, her eyes narrowing sharply. "He's stable, for now," she replied, her tone icy. "But he needs rest and care, not more of your tricks."

Ramsey took a step closer, his jaw tightening. "We don't have the luxury of time. Every moment counts."

Her eyes flashed with anger. "You don't get to make demands, Ramsey. You've already taken everything from us. My husband, my peace, and now my son's health. Haven't you done enough?"

Ramsey replied with deep regret, "I am sorry, Ruvana. I just don't know how to face you after all I've done. I did what I had to do and I know words cannot make up for your loss...."

"I don't need your pathetic apology," she spat, her voice trembling with fury. "You don't put a gun to someone's head, pull the trigger, and then apologize afterward. You destroyed us, our family, and then had the audacity to enter our lives as our physician. You killed my husband in cold blood and sat under the same roof he lived in... and I will never forgive you for it. And after all that, you dare to face me and apologize? GET OUT OF HERE!"

Ramsey's face contorted with pain, but he stood his ground.

"Ruvana, I may have done all that. I may have lied about many things, but the feelings I had for you and Ahnaf were never lies. Yes, I am a master at manipulation, but when I was taking care of him, having dinner with you on New Year's Eve, taking Ahnaf on bike



rides... those moments were real. I cared for Ahnaf and I considered both of you as my family."

Ruvana's eyes filled with tears, her voice breaking. "How can you say that? How can you claim to care for him after everything you've done? You shattered our lives, Ramsey. You took Zain from us, and now you want to take Ahnaf too?"

"Ruvana, please," he began, his voice steady but filled with emotion. "I need you to understand something. Everything I did, every lie I told, every action I took, was to protect Leeds from the Heartlands."

Ruvana looked up, her eyes still red from crying. "Protect Leeds? By destroying our family? How does that make any sense?"

Ramsey stepped closer, his gaze unwavering. "The Heartlands were planning something catastrophic. They were going to unleash chaos on Leeds, and I was the only one who could stop them from the inside. I had to gain their trust, become one of them, to sabotage their plans."

Ruvana's expression softened slightly, but her anger was still palpable. "And you thought that justified everything? Justified killing Zain?"

Ramsey's voice broke as he continued. "Zain's death was never part of the plan. It was a terrible consequence of the war we were fighting. I tried to protect him, taught him every skill he knows,

fighting, programming, hacking you name it but I failed. And for that, I am truly sorry."

Ruvana shook her head, her voice trembling. "You expect me to believe that? After all the lies?"

Ramsey nodded, his eyes pleading. "Yes, because it's the truth. I know I've done unforgivable things, but my intentions were always to protect the people of Leeds, including you and Ahnaf. I cared for you both more than you can imagine."

"Tell me the truth then, make it make sense," Ruvana demanded, her voice trembling with a mix of anger and desperation.



Ramsey took a deep breath, his eyes filled with regret. "It all begins with..."

**"The heartland mob,** They were just a bunch of troublemakers, nothing more. We had more important issues to deal with, and that's what the local police were for, despite their incompetence. But one

event changed everything. We received reports of an unknown entity working with them. An entity that had been spotted across millennia in our world, living in the shadows. Some called him **Yeti, Baba Yaga, Bigfoot, The Wolfman**, and many other names throughout history. He was the same person you fought—**Khan**. But I guess you've read the secret documents already, haven't you? So, I won't bore you by repeating how Khan and the Heartland Mob met. The moment we saw Khan interacting with the Heartlands, we started closely watching them for years. But he suddenly disappeared in **1985**.

After that, we backed off, leaving only me on their surveillance since **1994**. I was just a rookie agent back then, still learning the ropes. The only reason I was left was because the secret service feared Khan would return, but he never did. Soon, we found out that Khan wasn't the only problem.

**In 1995**, I infiltrated the Heartlands. After Khan left, the leader at the time was ruthless. He never cared for the well-being of people; he was aggressive in his approach, and the government had no proof of their wrongdoing. I was there for three years, trying to gather enough information, but they were all very secure."

Ruvana's eyes narrowed, but she remained silent, listening intently.

**"In 1998**, I assassinated the leader and became their new leader, 'The Boss.' Since then, I had to do a lot of bad things to make sure they trusted me, just so I could get access to their secret

documents. Making Zain lose his business and forcing him to join was one of those things."

Ruvana's breath hitched, but she didn't interrupt.

**"In 2000,** my unsuccessful attempts at gathering info led me slowly towards my deadline. After all, I couldn't spend my whole life being a mob boss, but definitely, as my first contract, it would push me to the lowest bracket of rankings. It was difficult to persuade them to let me stay. Until in September, something astonishing happened. A spacecraft crashed, and we saw a glimpse of Khan, which gave me all the permission to take over the entire case for myself. I was given only two objectives that no other agent was given in their entire lifetime:

Dismantle the Heartlands. Look for whatever came in from that spacecraft.

It didn't matter how long it took. I had to get it done. One wrong move, and I would have been done for. A lot of agents argued over it, but Director Leonis made his decision final. He said,

*'We could assign the finest agents to this case, the elite of the elite, but none of them would match what he has accomplished in just a few years. His persistence is unparalleled, a relentless drive that surpasses all the patience any of you possess. In him, I see a fire, a hunger that refuses to be extinguished. It is this unyielding determination that convinces me he will bring this case to its rightful conclusion.'*



Heh... he gives pretty good speeches still.

**In 2001**, I realized that maybe I couldn't dismantle the Heartlands from the inside, as the documents were hidden with one of the higher-ranked members, Hiram. He was definitely below me, but for some reason, none of us could ask him for the documents. So, I orchestrated a plan, and Zain was the key. Even after all these years, his anger towards us kept growing, unlike others who were too attracted to the money we made. I decided to start training him in various martial arts schools and taught him programming, just so he could get all the information, as my position was far too dangerous to relinquish."

Ramsey paused, his eyes searching Ruvana's face for any sign of understanding.

"As he was busy stealing Heartlands' data, I spent the next four years getting to know you and Ahnaf. Don't you think it's strange that Ahnaf was born in 2000 when Zain was still with us? And right after that strange circular space object crashed down on Earth that same year? It was just me gathering information from you at that time."

Ruvana's eyes widened, but she remained silent, her mind racing.

**"In 2005**, Zain failed. He got every single piece of evidence, but Hiram caught wind of it. He told me, and unfortunately, I had to take action. We chased him up the cliff, and I deliberately shot him,

making sure it didn't hit his vital organs. But the fall was too high. I regretted doing that. I made him the best, but he fell.

Since then, I've been doing all I can, regretting each and every moment of it."

**"In 2017,** it wasn't all lost. Zain strangely returned with even greater skills. The moment he started hacking our system, I tracked him down and found out it was Zain. He started calling himself this vigilante, Mid-Nite. Crazy, isn't it? I made sure he never knew about me, but he was relentless. He destroyed every hideout of ours with ease."

Ruvana's eyes filled with tears, but she still listened.

**"In 2018,** you already know what happened. Your son and Eric started discovering their powers, and Khan returned, demanding me to leave. It could have been a civil war until I orchestrated my master plan. I found out that all these years, he was looking for someone. I had a few guesses who it was, so I asked him for time and told him to meet me on January 10th, 2019. He would get what he wanted, and through Mid-Nite, I would finally be able to get all the documents against the Heartlands. Yes, the Leeds Vault incident and everything that happened was all part of my plan."

Ramsey's voice softened, laden with a mix of sorrow and determination. "Ruvana, I know I've done unforgivable things. My actions have caused pain and suffering, and for that, I am deeply sorry. But every decision I made, every line I crossed, was to protect

Leeds, and in a twisted way, to protect you and Ahnaf. I can't undo the past, but I can promise you this: I will do everything in my power to make things right. I owe you that much, and more."



I spoke up, breaking the heavy silence that had settled over the room. "You never come without a reason, Ramsey. What are you looking for?"

Ramsey's eyes met mine, a flicker of something unreadable passing through them. "A new mission... for you and James."

Captain James straightened, his expression shifting from concern to alertness. "What kind of mission?"

Ramsey took a deep breath, his gaze steady. "We've discovered the location of the lost Nexus shard."

The room seemed to shrink around us, the air growing thick with tension. Ruvana's eyes widened, her anger momentarily forgotten. "The Nexus shard? What even is that?"

Ramsey nodded; his face grim. "I'll fill you up on that later. It's in Nepal."

A chill ran down my spine. The Nexus shard was a powerful artifact, rumored to hold unimaginable energy. Its potential in the wrong hands was terrifying. "Nepal... that's a long way from here. How reliable is this information?"

James, ever the skeptic, asked, "How do you know?"

Ramsey's jaw tightened. "We never went to Nepal. None of us dared. Some entity was there, and their powers... magical or even

supernatural. But right now, I think we have the strength to go there. James just might be the key."

James raised an eyebrow, a smirk playing on his lips. "Oh great, so I'm the sacrificial lamb in this magical mystery tour?"

Ramsey couldn't help but chuckle, despite the gravity of the situation. "Not quite, James. Your ability to nullify magic will be a great help to us. It's the only way we can counter whatever is guarding the shard."

James leaned back, crossing his arms with a mock sigh. "Well, when you put it that way, how can I refuse? Just another day in the life of the Nullifier."

The tension in the room eased slightly, but the seriousness of the mission was not lost on any of us. Ruvana's eyes flickered with a mix of hope and fear. "And what about Ahnaf? What happens to him while you're off chasing this shard?"

Ramsey's eyes softened as he looked at her. "Ahnaf will be safe. I'll make sure of it. Khan won't be returning anytime soon, from his patterns he always returns when Ahnaf is at full strength."

I asked again, my curiosity and frustration bubbling to the surface. "You never told us what Khan was looking for."

Ramsey's eyes darkened, a shadow passing over his face. "Get the shard, be powerful enough, and ask him yourself."



The room fell silent, the weight of his words hanging in the air. The implication was clear: whatever Khan was after, it was something beyond our current understanding, something that required the power of the Nexus shard to confront.

James broke the tension with a wry smile ready to leave. "Well, that's reassuring. Just another day in the life of chasing down mystical artifacts and confronting shadowy figures. I guess this is my new life now."



The morning air was crisp as Ramsey, me, and James gathered our gear and prepared to leave for the airport. The gravity of our mission weighed heavily on our shoulders, but there was a sense of

urgency driving us forward. Captain Davis stood by Ahnaf's bedside, his expression a mix of concern and determination.

Ramsey turned to Captain Davis, his voice firm. "Davis, I need you to stay here and ensure Ahnaf's safety. No one gets in or out without your approval."

Captain Davis nodded; his eyes steely. "Understood, sir. I'll keep him safe."



Ruvana stood nearby, her eyes filled with worry as she watched the preparations. "Please, be careful," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

Ramsey gave her a reassuring nod. "We will. And we'll bring back the shard."

Me, ever the optimist, tried to lighten the mood. "Don't worry, Ruvana. We'll be back before you know it, with the Nexus shard in hand."

James, with his usual bravado, added, "And maybe a few souvenirs from Nepal. I hear the food's great."

Ramsey couldn't help but smile at their attempts to ease the tension. "Alright, let's move out."

Then we made their way to the waiting vehicle, the engine already running. The recent defeat at the hands of Khan weighed heavily on me. Despite taking the Step UP drug, which was supposed to enhance my abilities, I had still fallen short. The memory of that battle replayed in my mind, each moment a reminder of my perceived inadequacy.

I glanced at Ramsey and James, both of whom seemed resolute and focused. I couldn't help but feel a pang of doubt. Was I really cut out for this mission? Could I truly make a difference, or would I just be a liability?

As we loaded our gear into the vehicle, my thoughts drifted back to the fight with Khan. I had given everything I had, pushing my body and powers to their limits, yet it hadn't been enough. The Step UP

drug had promised to elevate my strength and abilities, but in the end, it had only highlighted my shortcomings.

"Eric, you ready?" James's voice snapped me out of my reverie.

I forced a smile, nodding. "Yeah, I'm ready."

But inside, I wasn't so sure. The fear of failure gnawed at me, a constant reminder of my last encounter with Khan. I knew I had to push past it, to find the strength within myself to face whatever lay ahead in Nepal. The stakes were too high for me to falter now.

As we drove to the airport, my mind continued to race. I couldn't shake the feeling of inadequacy, but I also knew that I couldn't let it control me. I had to find a way to overcome my doubts, to prove to myself and my team that I was capable.

I could feel the weight of our mission pressing down on all of us. Ramsey was focused, his eyes scanning the road ahead, while I was lost in my thoughts, still grappling with my doubts. James, however, seemed determined to lighten the mood.

"Alright, folks," James said, clapping his hands together. "Let's not all sit here like we're heading to a funeral. We're on a mission to save the world! How cool is that?"

I couldn't help but smile at his enthusiasm. "Yeah, I guess when you put it that way, it does sound pretty epic."



James grinned, leaning back in his seat. "Exactly! And you know what every epic mission needs? A killer soundtrack." He pulled out his phone and started scrolling through his playlist. "How about some classic rock to get us pumped?"

Ramsey raised an eyebrow, a hint of amusement in his eyes. "As long as it's not too loud. We need to stay focused."

James nodded, selecting a song and turning up the volume just enough to fill the car with the familiar riffs of "Eye of the Tiger." He started bobbing his head to the beat, and I couldn't help but join in.

"Come on, Ramsey," James said, nudging him with his elbow. "You know you want to."

Ramsey shook his head, but there was a small smile playing on his lips. "I'm more of a classical music kind of guy."

James feigned shock. "Classical? Really? I never would have guessed. Alright, let's see what we can do about that." He scrolled through his playlist again and found a symphony. "How about some Beethoven, then?"

The car filled with the dramatic strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and James started conducting an imaginary orchestra with exaggerated movements. "Da-da-da-da! Da-da-da-da!"

I laughed, feeling some of the tension ease away. Even Ramsey chuckled, shaking his head at James's antics. "Alright, alright. You've made your point."

James grinned triumphantly. "See? Music really does soothe the savage beast."

As the symphony played on, James continued his comedic routine, narrating our mission as if it were an over-the-top action movie trailer. "In a world where danger lurks around every corner, three heroes embark on a quest to save humanity. Starring Ramsey, the stoic leader with a mysterious past; Eric, the determined warrior seeking redemption; and James, the charming rogue with a heart of gold."

I couldn't help but laugh at his dramatic voice. "Charming rogue, huh? Is that how you see yourself?"

James winked. "Hey, every team needs a little charm. And besides, it sounds better than 'the guy who nullifies magic.'"

Ramsey shook his head, but there was a genuine smile on his face now. "You certainly have a way with words, James."

James leaned back, satisfied with his work. "That's what I'm here for. To keep things light and make sure we don't lose our minds before we even get to Nepal."

The rest of the drive was filled with more jokes and lighthearted banter, and by the time we reached the airport, the mood had lifted considerably. Even though the mission ahead was daunting, I felt a renewed sense of camaraderie and determination. We were in this together, and no matter what challenges lay ahead, we would face them as a team.



We reached the airport, the early morning light casting long shadows across the tarmac. As we stepped out of the vehicle, I spotted Director Leonis waiting for us near the entrance. His presence was a reminder of the gravity of our mission, and the responsibility that lay on our shoulders.

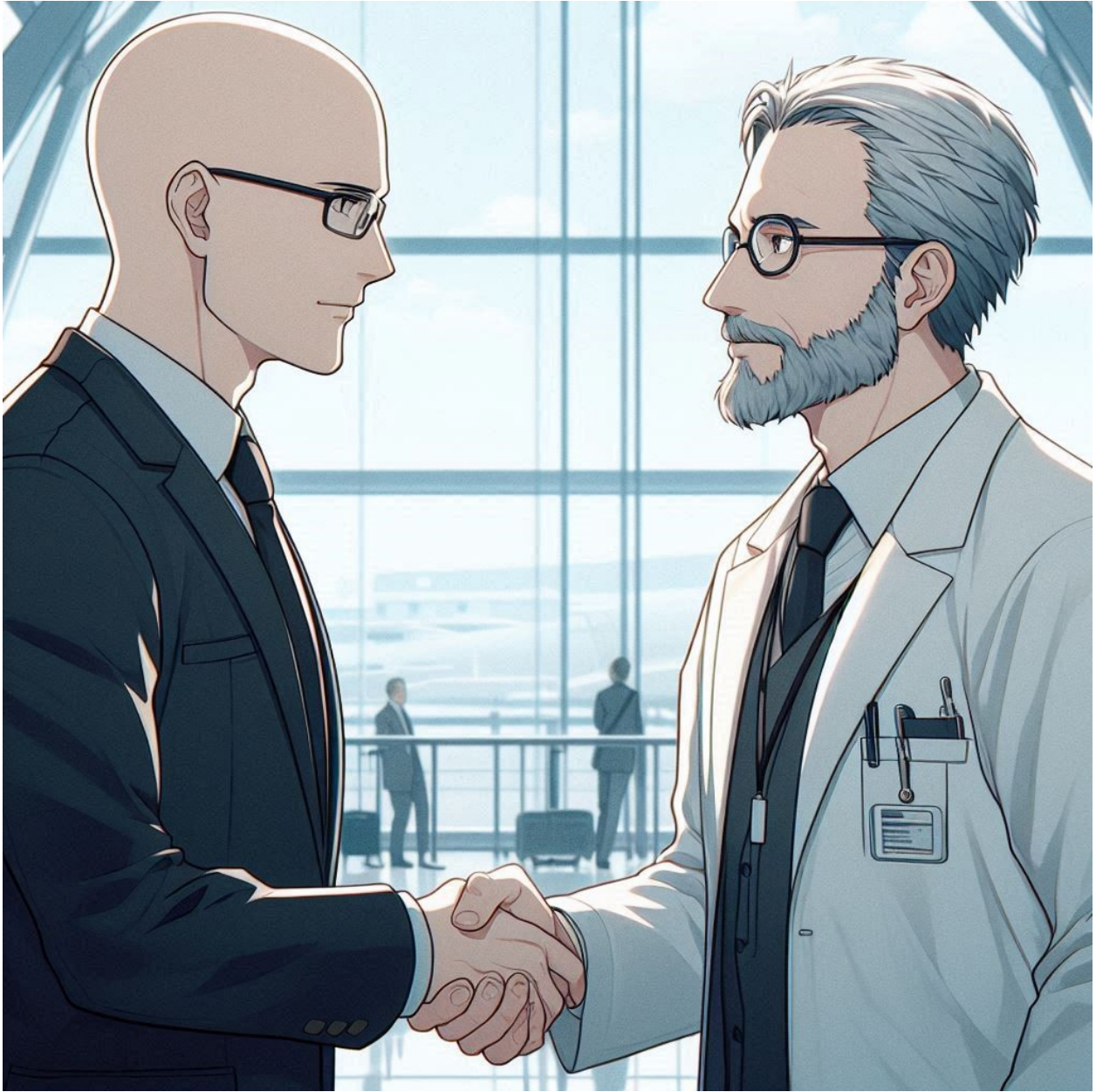
"Director," Ramsey greeted him with a nod.

Leonis's stern expression softened slightly as he looked at us. "I wanted to see you off personally. This mission is critical, and I have every confidence in your abilities. Remember, the fate of Leeds—and possibly more—rests on your success."

I nodded, feeling the weight of his words. "We won't let you down, sir."

Leonis's gaze shifted to James, who gave a mock salute. "Don't worry, Director. We'll bring back the Nexus shard and maybe even some souvenirs."

A small smile tugged at the corners of Leonis's mouth. "Just make sure you come back in one piece. Good luck."



With that, he turned and walked away, leaving us to continue to the airfield. As we approached, I saw the rest of our team waiting by the plane. Lt. Cheng stood with her arms crossed, her sharp eyes scanning the surroundings. She was our stern combat specialist and analyzer, always ready to dissect any situation with precision.



"Ms. Cheng," Ramsey greeted her. "Everything in order?"

She nodded curtly. "All set Sir. I've reviewed the intel and prepared the necessary equipment. We're ready to move out."

Next to her was Ms. Tiffany, the Mexican cook and James's girlfriend. Her warm smile was a stark contrast to Lt. Cheng's stern demeanor. She stepped forward, giving James a quick hug.

"James!!! I missed you!," she said, her voice filled with excitement.

James grinned, giving her a reassuring squeeze. "haha what are you even talking about, I've been gone only a few hours."

Tiffany laughed, her eyes sparkling. "Oh shush now, I miss you every minute of the day."



Ramsey cleared his throat, drawing our attention. "Alright, everyone. Let's get on board. We have a long journey ahead of us."

The hum of the private jet's engines was a constant backdrop as we soared through the skies towards Nepal. Tiffany was busy in the small kitchen, her movements swift and efficient as she prepared a meal for the team. The aroma of spices and freshly cooked food filled the cabin, providing a comforting contrast to the tension of our mission.

Lt. Cheng sat at a table, her laptop open and various documents spread out before her. She was analyzing the latest intel, her eyes flicking back and forth across the screen with laser focus. Every now and then, she would jot down notes or adjust the data, her mind clearly working through the complexities of our mission.

James, never one to miss an opportunity for some lighthearted banter, leaned against the counter near Tiffany, a playful grin on his face. "So, Tiff, what's on the menu today? Something spicy to match your fiery personality?"

Tiffany rolled her eyes but couldn't suppress a smile. "Just some simple tacos. Figured I'd bring a little taste of home with us."

James's eyes lit up. "Tacos? You know the way to my heart."

She laughed, shaking her head. "You and your stomach. Always thinking about food."

"Hey, a man needs his fuel," James replied, winking at her.

"Especially when he's about to save the world."

I watched their exchange from my seat by the window, a small smile tugging at my lips. Their playful banter was a welcome distraction from the weight of our mission. Outside, the clouds drifted by, the vast expanse of the sky a reminder of how far we had to go.

Ramsey, meanwhile, was deep in conversation with Lt. Cheng. He leaned over her shoulder, pointing at something on the screen. "We need to be prepared for anything. We don't know what forces are at play here."

As the plane continued its journey, the cabin was filled with a mix of determination, anticipation, and a touch of humor. We were a team, each of us bringing our unique strengths to the table. **And together, we would face whatever challenges lay ahead in Nepal.**

